



The Church Bell

Volume 80, Issue 7

Next Issue: September 2, 2025

Submission Deadline for Next Issue: August 27, 2025

Submit articles using the announcement request form at
firstconggreeley.org/announcements

The Busy Bell: Jam-Packed Edition

Natural Playground by the Bell!

From the time we began our multi-year outdoor landscaping project, we've imagined a small, natural playscape for our kids nestled in by the bell tower along 16th. This new playscape is installed and has been a delightful new place for kids of all ages to balance, hop, skip, and jump on rocks, logs, and pavers. Many of the materials were reclaimed from trees on our property that had reached the end of their lives and had to be removed. There's a great shady sitting spot, an outdoor checkerboard, and even a pipe-and-paddle instrument to play with. Be sure to check it out and share with your friends; our outdoor spaces are meant to draw in the entire community!

A special thanks goes out to Ron Brinkman and Betony Coons for helping to imagine and implement these spaces!



All Around FCC

Rooted in God's Love

General Synod Report from Tammi

In July, I had the opportunity to attend General Synod, the national gathering of the UCC. The Love of Children grant from the UCC covered the entirety of my expenses! My time there was a mix of watching the business meetings, volunteering with the children's ministry programming, and getting to know delightful people from across our denomination. I came away with a greater appreciation for the variety of congregations that make up the UCC, the ways we engage in dialogue together, and the joy that comes from intentionally partnering with other churches across the US to create welcoming, joyful spaces for all people to know God's love.



Office Closed Tues. August 12

On Tuesday, August 12, the church office will be closed while we have our carpets cleaned! Staff will be working remotely and will be available by phone or email, should you need to reach us. We will reopen with regular hours on Wednesday, August 13.

Financial Gifts

The church always welcomes gifts in honor and celebration of member milestones, as well as in memory of those in our community. This month, we received the following gifts:

- In celebration of Lola Fehr's good health and return to the sanctuary
- In memory of Shirley Olson
- In memory of Jeannine and Shad Shadwick

Need to talk to a particular staff person? Please make an appointment!

The church has regular office hours from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday - Thursday and we make every effort to have a staff person or a volunteer in the office to welcome you during that time. We also include a note in the Friday blast and bulletin if we know we will be closed. Even so, sometimes folks stop by looking for us - particularly for Rev. Ben, Rev. Tamara, and Laura - only to find that we aren't available. Each of us spends part of our work time in our office, but also works remotely, has one-on-one meetings on and off site, and flexes our time to accommodate evening and weekend events. We understand that it can be frustrating to arrive with a question or concern for us and find us unavailable!

We would love to meet with you and want to be able to give you our undivided attention when we do. The best way to ensure that we are available is to make an appointment with us. You can call, text, or email any of us to make an appointment. You may also always schedule an appointment with Laura [here](#) (this link is always in her email signature, too).

Rev. Ben: (970) 237-1246 or revben@firstconggreeley.org
Rev. Tamara: (207) 653-8749 or revtamara@firstconggreeley.org
Laura: (970) 616-5352 or laura@firstconggreeley.org

Weld Food Bank Backpacks

Each year, our congregation helps to support the Weld Food Bank Backpack Program. This program supports students across Weld County experiencing food insecurity by sending them home with child-friendly foods each weekend. It costs \$100 to sponsor a child for a year. Our goal each year is to sponsor one backpack for every child and youth active in our church - making our goal 74 backpacks or \$7,400 this year! You can make a contribution of any size [here](#) by selecting "Weld Food Bank Backpacks" in the first dropdown, or via cash or check marked "Backpacks."

FCC's Bookshop!

Next time you're looking to purchase a book, please consider making your purchase through our Bookshop - a digital bookstore who shares proceeds both with our local bookstore (The Midnight Oil) and the church! All proceeds from our Bookshop storefront support our continued commitment to excellent progressive theology, creating spaces of welcome, and thoughtful discourse about the ways we are shaped by the life and teachings of Jesus. Our Bookshop link is featured on our website under the "Connect" tab. [Click here to go straight to our whole bookshop.](#) Below, we have listed our special recommendation lists. Check them out!

- [For Your Whole Family](#)
- [Indigenous Wisdom](#)
- [Grief](#)
- [Grief for Kids](#)
- [Devotionals](#)
- [Spirituality](#)
- [Theology](#)
- [Revelation Series](#)

Thanks for Sustaining La Foret Camps!

One of the challenges to sustaining the magic of camp at La Foret is bringing together the volunteer support that keeps camp running! This year, FCC was delighted to have many of our own helping to keep camp alive!

Sarah Hulac, a recent high school graduate, was a counselor for elementary camps; Kaleigh Avers, a former member and recent high school graduate drove all the way down from her home in Oregon to be a counselor for elementary camps; and Bridget Hulac, who recently obtained her CNA license, stepped up when we found ourselves without a camp nurse, a legal requirement to keep camp running! Whitney Janzen-Pankratz, one of our Members in Discernment, served as camp chaplain and two camps were directed by Robb Carlson, an FCC member who lives in Utah.

What a joy it is to have so many of "ours" supporting camp and ensuring that it remains a place of spiritual welcome and development for all!

Welcome The Greeley Chorale!

We continue to find ways to share our space with other local nonprofits and this month, we're excited to welcome The Greeley Chorale to our building! The Greeley Chorale is renting a downstairs storage space for their choral library and will join our other downstairs nonprofits: Union Colony Children's Music Academy, Soccer Without Borders, the Greeley Philharmonic Youth Orchestra, and Greeley Titans Basketball. Special thanks to Kelly Agnew, Erika & Sydney Houtchens, Mary Hulac, and Tammi VanDrunen (and Flat Jesus!) for helping us move our storage rooms around to be able to share our space with The Chorale!



Returning to Fall Programming

Nourished on Our Spiritual Journeys

Fall Picnic & Annual BratFest!

Join us Sunday, September 8 at 11:30 a.m. for our annual Fall Picnic and BratFest! This is a back-to-the-program-year tradition at FCC, complete with food, games, and a bounce house. We'll provide the brats (GF and veggie options included), buns, and condiments; you potluck the rest!

Scripture Seminar Resumes!

Our Bible study led by Rev. Ben will resume on Thursday, September 4th. The class meets on Zoom from 1 to 2 p.m. and will start the year reading the book of Acts of the Apostles. Please contact Rev. Ben if you are interested in participating or if you would like any more information!

Choirs Return!

Adult Choirs resume on Thursday September 4th! Come and join us for the coming season as we prepare for the coming season, the Congregational Caberational, and so much more! The Bell and Chancel Choirs will meet for a welcome back picnic on August 28th at 5:00pm at the home of Eric and Amy Long. No experience required! - come and see what we are all about.

Contact Nicholas Gilmore for details at nicholas@firstconggreeley.org.

Kids Choirs Return

FCC Kids Choirs will resume on Sunday, September 7! Participants enjoy singing, moving, games, music literacy and singing for worship service once a month. Rainbow (ages 5 years - 2nd grade) and Jubilation (3rd-5th grades) rehearse every Sunday morning from 9 - 9:45 in the choir room downstairs. New singers are always welcome! For more information, please reach out to Shona Royle-Grimes (shonaroylegrimes@gmail.com) or Kathy Azari (kathyazaria@comcast.net).

Confirmation

We are so excited to begin our Confirmation journey for the 2025-2026 program year. We are trying something a little different! Confirmands can complete their journey in one program year or they can spread their journey out through the 2027-2028 program year, if applicable. Classes will be offered Sundays after worship, and we have special field trips and other offerings chosen to support our Confirmands in their spiritual development. Confirmation will be open to all incoming eighth graders and high school students.

To learn more about this year's Confirmation curriculum, visit firstconggreeley.org/youthministry.

Children & Youth Safety Training

Whether you're a volunteer in our children & youth departments or just curious about what we do to protect our children and youth, we invite you to join us Saturday, September 13 for a Children & Youth Safety Training! Details are still being finalized, but please reach out to Tammi VanDrunen for more information (tammi@firstconggreeley.org).

Spanish Conversation Circle

Due to scheduling challenges, the Summer Spanish Circle will instead be a Fall Spanish Circle. Kai Davison and Rev. Tamara Torres McGovern are still committed to getting this conversation off the ground! Join us on Sunday, August 31st at 11:30 in Slighter Hall. Bring a light snack or lunch item to share. There will be time for Spanish conversation (it's okay if you are rusty!) and we will decide on a format for future gatherings. ¡Queremos hablar contigo!

FOG Host Opportunities!

We have openings on our schedule for August and October FOG hosts! If you've got indoor or outdoor gathering space and would like to open your home to others in our community for two hours of fellowship, wine (or other drinks of choice), and snacks, we'd love to add you to our host list! Hosts are welcome to borrow tables, chairs, and wine glasses from the church (but are responsible for their pickup and return). We take care of the advertising and attendees bring the food and drink! If you're interested in hosting or learning more, please reach out to Bryan Cooke at cookesahib@yahoo.com or (970) 415-7677.

Grant Money Stretches Ministry Budgets

Tammi has been working hard to make ministry dollars stretch! The Slow Summer family event on June 8th was almost entirely covered by a microgrant from Thrivent Financial. Thanks to Thrivent and FCC Member Carol Brickley for helping put that together!

You'll also see a small refresh of the children's "playground" in the front of the sanctuary with a new shelf and soft baskets to hold books and activities. This refresh was provided by the Love of Children grant from the national setting of the UCC.

You'll also soon see two new offerings, both funded by microgrants from GenOn Ministries. The first provided supplies for our Worship Buffet - a new offering of interactive and tactile materials for all ages to use during worship. And the second is a Faithful Families class that Tammi and Laura will be offering later this fall - watch for more information to come!

We're continuing to look for grant opportunities to stretch the dollars we have and make our dreams come true. If you have ideas, please let Tammi know. If you're a Thrivent member and would be willing to use your Action Team grant to fund a small dream of any FCC ministry area, please contact Laura or Tammi and they'll help connect you to a need we have.

Adventures with Flat Jesus

Flat Jesus has been a real travelin' man this summer! People from across the church have been taking Jesus on their summer adventures! He's helped us clean out some storage spaces, visited The White House, ridden the Durango-Silverton train, stopped at the Garden of Eden, seen a dinosaur, and even made a trip to Oz! Check out all of Flat Jesus' adventures [here](#) and be sure to keep sharing your photos with Brooklyn (brooklyn@firstconggreeley.org).

Fall Music Classes

Children's music classes for Fall 2025 are enrolling now at Union Colony Children's Music Academy, just downstairs! UCCMA has family music classes for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers, Pre-Piano, Piano, Ukulele, and Guitar classes for 4 to 12 year olds, and Adaptive and Inclusive Music and Movement classes with morning, afternoon, and evening times available. Come sing, dance, play, and learn together with your child! For more information, call (970) 353-1116 or visit their website at unioncolonychildrensmusic.org.

Save the Date: Fall Youth Retreat

Save the date for this year's Fall Youth Retreat at LaForet! Join us October 17-19 for a weekend of connection at camp. More details are [available here](#).



Youth Room Renovations Fundraiser

We have had the opportunity to add a couple of really exciting features to our new youth room, including a beehive sitting wall and a collaborative art project that the youth will participate in with Betony Coons. We could use your help in raising \$5,000 in additional funds to ensure these projects can happen! Gifts of any size help us meet our goal; gifts of \$50 or more will receive a limited edition art print of the new youth space! Gifts can be made [online here](#) by selecting "Youth Room" in the fund dropdown or by cash or check anytime by marking "Youth Room" on the memo line or envelope.

Connect with FCC

Growing as an Inclusive Presence in Northern Colorado & Beyond

Final Summer Movie: Encanto!

Join us on Wednesday, August 6 for the last film in our Summer Movie Series: Encanto! Encanto tells the tale of an extraordinary family, the Madrigals, who live hidden in a charmed place called an Encanto. The magic of the Encanto has blessed every child in the family with a unique gift from super strength to the power to heal — every child except one, Mirabel (voice of Stephanie Beatriz). But when she discovers that the magic surrounding the Encanto is in danger, Mirabel decides that she, the only ordinary Madrigal, might just be her exceptional family's last hope. Wear your cozies, bring your dinner and/or snacks, and join us in Chadwick Hall! We'll bring the popcorn and ice cream or popsicle treats! Encanto is rated PG and run time is 1 hour, 42 minutes.

Work Day: August 9

Join us Saturday, August 9 from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. for a work day! Projects include finishing the youth room and library, assembling furniture, doing paint touch ups, furniture moving for carpet cleaning, moving rock and mulch to the children's playscape, and more! Open gym is available for kids ages 3 years - 5th grade from 8 a.m. to noon. Even if you can only join for an hour, your help gets us across the finish line!

Welcome Lunch

Our next Welcome Lunch for all who are new(ish) to the church will be held Sunday, August 17 at 11:30 a.m. in Slighter Hall. This is an opportunity to meet our staff, learn a bit about the church, become a member, and get to know other folks who are new around FCC. Your RSVP is appreciated to ensure we've got plenty of food. Please RSVP [here](#) or reach out to Laura (laura@firstconggreeley.org).

Put on Those Dancin' Shoes!

Join the John Mills Orchestra on Monday, August 18 at 6:30 p.m. in Chadwick Hall for a jazz concert. Bring your dancing shoes; we'll have the dance floor ready! The concert is free and open to the public, so please invite your friends!

Five Points Tour

On Saturday, August 23, the Conversations on Race group will offer a guided tour of the [Blair Caldwell African American Research Library and Museum](#) on Welton Street, one of a limited number of Black research libraries in our country. Shanti Zaid, who works with special collections and archives, will share his vast expertise on both the library and details on Five Points individuals and history.

The tour will leave the church at about 9:15 a.m., include the personalized tour, a stop at [brother jeff's Cultural Center](#), and a late lunch at [Welton Street Cafe](#). Participants will arrive back to the church around 4 p.m. Please reach out to Misti Aas to RSVP or with questions (mistiaas1@gmail.com or 970-396-4266).

Travel to Italy with FCC!

We are dreaming of (and laying the groundwork for) a trip to Rome and Florence Italy in 2026. If you are interested in learning more and offering your two cents regarding dates and must-see stops, please join Rev. Tamara, Rev. Ben and Nicholas Gilmore for an informational meeting. We will gather in Slighter Hall on August 24th at 11:45 a.m. Hope to see you there!

Conversations on Race Dinner with Dr. Achilles Bardos

The Conversations on Race (COR) group would like to invite you to a Greek dinner at Roasty's on September 19 at 5:30 p.m. with Dr. Achilles Bardos, a retired UNC professor and owner of Roasty's. He serves authentic Greek food and has offered to do a special event night for us! Please RSVP to Heather Schulte at schulte101@ymail.com by 9/1.

New Member Welcome: Laura Flynn



Born and raised in northern Wisconsin, I loved the woods and birds and animals, Lake Superior and the rivers. As a kid, I had relatives in every direction. I met a guy and we married. Eventually moved to Rochester, MN, and then we had two precious little boys. I visited Wendi and Aron in Greeley. Colin and Niall are really great grandchildren. I've been lucky to live here, near their family. I started coming to FCC to see the boys in programs. I really enjoyed the services and the inclusiveness.

New Member Welcome: Caitlin Graefe



I've lived in Greeley my whole life but have traveled all over the world. My favorite place I've been to is a tie between Reykjavik and Paris. I graduated from UNC with a masters in sociology, but now teach PE at Scott Elementary. My favorite hobbies are reading and coaching volleyball. At FCC, I love the welcoming environment and commitment to our community!

New Member Welcome: Melissa & Marcos



Hi! We have been together for 13 years, married for 11, and have four (4) children between the two of us (ages 17, 19, 21, and 30). Marcos currently works as a supervisor for Larimer County Department of Human Services in Fort Collins and Melissa has been a Probation Officer for Weld County for the last 25 years. In our free time, we can be found hiking the Rocky Mountains, camping, and riding our motorcycles. Since joining the church, we have felt so very welcomed and accepted and are thankful for the warmth and friendship we've encountered so far. Looking forward to many more great times ahead!

Breeze

Learn about how to use Breeze, our new church management system, with Laura! In these videos, Laura breaks down all the important stuff you need to know to help you navigate your Breeze account. You can log into your account on our website under the "Members" tab or by [clicking this link](#).

- [Watch Lesson 1: The Directory](#)
- [Watch Lesson 2: Your Profile](#)
- [Watch Lesson 3: Giving](#)
- [Watch Lesson 4: Church Calendar](#)

You can also [click here](#) to see the whole playlist of tutorials.

In Loving Memory

Please hold the families and loved ones of the following in your prayers:

Bob Mitchell

March 11, 1923 – April 5, 2025

A service was held Wednesday, July 30th.

Nancy Wood

October 13, 1950 – June 30, 2025

A service will be held Monday, August 11th at 11 a.m. in the sanctuary. A livestream will be available.

Shirley Olson

March 22, 1940 - July 1, 2025

Private family services will be held later this year.

Deanna Holmes

January 31, 1937 - July 29, 2025

A service will be held Friday, August 22nd at 11 a.m. in the sanctuary.

Joanne Thompson

December 21, 1931 - August 3, 2025

Service will be held Saturday, August 16 at 10 a.m. in the sanctuary. A livestream will be available.

Celebrating Whitney Janzen-Pankratz



On Sunday, August 11 at 4 p.m., we will hold the Ecclesiastical Council (often referred to as just an "EC") for Member In Discernment Whitney Janzen-Pankratz. An EC is a time when the whole denominational Conference gathers to hear about, discern, and vote upon a person's call to ordained ministry and is the last milestone before ordination. Whitney has prepared a [Marks Portfolio](#), which demonstrates the ways she lives into the [Marks of Faithful and Effective Ministry](#) set forth by the United Church of Christ.

Whitney's Ecclesiastical Council will be held on August 11 via Zoom from 4 to 6 p.m. [Pre-registration](#) is required in order to receive the Zoom link. From 7 to 8 p.m., we will gather in Chadwick Hall to celebrate Whitney with a cake and ice cream reception. We hope you will join us for one or both of these events! Whitney's ordination is anticipated to be in-person later this year at UCC Longmont. We'll be sure to announce those details when they're available!

A Note from Whitney:

Thank you all for your support and care throughout my seminary journey, and as a Member in Discernment for Ordination. As a final step toward ordination and installation in my role as Minister of Community Faith Formation at UCC Longmont, the Committee on Ministry of the Rocky Mountain Conference of the UCC will be hosting an Ecclesiastical Council (EC) to call a vote affirming my call to ordained ministry. As the beloved community that has journeyed with me and my family over the last decade, I would love to have you there to celebrate this milestone with me! After the EC is complete, our final step will be an in-person service of ordination and installation at UCC Longmont (date and time TBD). I would love to have you there!

Member Spotlights: Betony & Tim Coons



Church member Tim Coons wrote an article that appeared in the Greeley Tribune back in March. This opinion piece is titled, "Where are you giving your attention?" We have a digital copy available for all church members to read at [this link](#).

Earlier this summer, the Denver Zoo celebrated the grand opening of Betony Coons' Wild Village, an immersive play experience created in partnership with the Denver Zoo Conservation Alliance. Many of our church members were there to see this come to life! Read more about Betony's gorgeous project at [this link](#).

